

Hutchesons' Grammar School Association

Minute of meeting of the School Association – Founders Room,
Monday 11 May 2015.

Present

S3 Kenneth Ritchie (Chairman) (KR)
P1 Kenneth Kirkwood (KK)
P3 Alan Hair (AH)
P4 Faiza Khan (FK)
P5 Arlene Rennet (AR)
P6 Wendy Schenini (WS)
P7 Elaine Lonergan (EL)
S1 Audrey Mason (AM)
S2 Sue Redpath (SR2)
S4 Shazma Shafi (SS)
S5 David Hadden (Minutes) (DH)
S6 Allison Ewing (AE)

In attendance

Brian Williams (BW)
Ken Greig (KG)
Fiona Macphail (FM)
Katy Chisholm (KC)
Brian MacBride (BM)
Susie Rodgers (SR)

Apologies

Iain Keter (IK)
P2 Martyn Campbell (MC)

1. Adoption of Minutes – 23 February 2015 - the minutes were accepted as an accurate record, subject to recording Mrs Shafi as present and 2 minor corrections to minute 4(i) in respect of School Meals (Kingarth Street) and 6 (Primary Report). The minutes were proposed and seconded

2. Circulation, Approval, Publication and Purpose of the Minutes – the group considered this matter and after discussion agreed to try to improve the process for all parents by publishing the draft agenda, including 'matters raised by parents' on the website in advance of each meeting, beginning with the first meeting of session 2015/16. It was recognised this might create further challenges, however this may mitigate concerns that parental engagement through the School Association need be improved.

3. Matters raised by parent members.

3(i) Exam Leave – 4th, 5th and 6th years – KG addressed this item, highlighting that the leave was determined by striking the most practical balance between leave and the spread of exams. He drew attention to the fact that in the last 2 years SQA has moved away from starting the exam schedule with English (taken by all pupils) to a varied subject start which inevitably complicates the best date on which to begin study leave. He also explained the need to continue teaching in subjects where no examination was taken by some pupils in 4th Year4 (Maths, History and Modern Studies) and reminded members that teaching staff remained available to pupils for discussion/consultation whether during normal timetables or during study leave and that there were many examples of pupils making use of this support. In response to an observation that reduced exam leave around the time of the preliminary exams with more extensive leave at the time of the SQA exams would be preferable KG noted that all the arrangements

were regularly reviewed to maximise teaching time around both internal and SQA exam diets.

3(ii) 2nd Year Timetable Changes – KG also addressed this matter, raised in regard to the timing and opportunity for pupils to move to their 3rd year syllabus, In many ways this represents a challenge similar to the previous item as year-end exams require to be taken, subject choices made and 3rd year arrangements including scheduling of ‘new’ class teachers effected. KG explained the timing of the various stages and assured all present that the key decisions were always made with the aim of delivering the best learning opportunities for pupils.

3(iii) Whole School Assemblies – frequency and purpose. KG set out the current arrangements for whole school assemblies, highlighting that even with the refurbished main hall, unfortunately it was not feasible to accommodate the entire secondary pupil group at a single event. As a result assemblies take place on Mondays and Tuesdays each week with one general assembly for 4th, 5th and 6th years and another for 1st, 2nd and 3rd years while on Wednesdays and Thursdays, 3 assemblies are held for Christian, Muslim and Jewish faiths – each assembly is open to any pupil and there is evidence that some pupils are attending different assemblies which encourages understanding and a wider school community approach which is viewed positively. In addition – on a monthly basis, a set of assemblies is held with a visiting single faith leader present. It remained the view of some members of the committee that the esprit de corps established and promoted by larger assemblies would be beneficial especially for the younger secondary pupils and in particular those in 1st Year when the Kingarth street pupils were introduced to those admitted from other schools.

3(iv) Playground Facilities (with particular reference to S1 pupils). In response to this query, KG confirmed that there was no segregation, however some S1 pupils opted to use the disused tennis courts for the purpose of playing football at break times, thus segregating themselves from the remainder of senior school pupils. It was recognised that ‘playground’ facilities at Beaton Road were not great (however given the diverse range of societies and clubs and other activities available at breaks, it is not likely that the facilities provision will change).

3(v) Discipline. In response to a concern raised in respect of alleged indiscipline and bullying amongst a group of 3rd Year boys KG addressed this matter and made it very clear that management at all levels positively encouraged good discipline and took firm and appropriate action when indiscipline occurred. He confirmed that bullying was completely unacceptable. He also advised he proposed to issue a timely reminder to all regarding this aspect of school life.

3(vi) Additional Support for Learning (ASL) – KG addressed this matter, it having been carried over from a previous meeting. The key areas highlighted were confirmation for parents that the arrangements for dealing with ASL differed between the Primary and Secondary schools in a manner adjudged best to meet the needs of the pupils who required support. Within the Primary there were 6

designated and trained members of staff to support ASL needs in addition to the staff required to deliver the curriculum across all primary years in relatively small classes and with additional classroom assistants. In the Senior school the arrangements are that every teacher is aware of their pupils' needs (prompted, by individual record keeping) and has the responsibility to ensure all pupils under their guidance are taught and supported appropriately. This means that Senior school pupils with recorded ASL requirements are not extracted from classes, which the Rector opined the correct approach. The Head of Learning Support (Senior school) monitors the provision of additional supports where these have been identified by staff or sought by parents. In addition within the Senior school, there is a number of record arrangements for pupils with ASL requirements – these are used to ensure pupils are provided with the most appropriate support, including, where appropriate, specialist certificate examination support arrangements developed within 3rd Year for pupils who will take SQA certificate exams in the following years.

KG completed his report in this area by addressing in turn the school position with regard to each of the points on this topic previously submitted on behalf of parents (as appended hereto) and emphasising that the range and nature of supports identified for individual children varied widely amongst the children for whom such additional provision was made. Given the particularly sensitive nature of this topic, parents were reminded to approach the school at the earliest point if they consider there is a 'problem' not being addressed satisfactorily. In particular he assured the meeting that all members of staff were made aware of the need to support and be supportive towards those children with identified, additional needs.

Given the lengthy and detailed discussion which had taken place The Chairman noted he did not anticipate this need be an item of business in the near future.

3(vii) Blood Donation Service – Timing of Visit. KG agreed to review the timing of this event following a parental request based on the fact that a number of pupils had fainted/felt unwell at the most recent session and it had been questioned whether the timing, close to exams/prelims had perhaps compounded the problem.

4. Rectors report.

4(i) School Inspection – KG updated the group, on the very recent inspection which had involved 3 inspectors over 3 days just after the Easter break. The inspection appears to have gone very well. Part of the formal feedback will be to identify areas where it is considered improvements can be made. During the process the inspectors noted that there was a 'Commitment to and a culture of self evaluation' and that 'High quality teaching was delivering high levels of attainment'. Mention was made of the range and quality of co-curricular offerings, and that there were opportunities for better engagement with parents, staff and pupils through increased communication. The school has a 'good story' but 'could trumpet (tell) it better'. Finally, in terms of innovative practice, the inspectors commended the 'Junior/Mini Duke Scheme' introduced by Mrs Waugh and supported by numerous members of staff which they indicated they would share publish and promote as a "good practice example". KG was justifiably pleased so

far and indicated that parents would receive feedback around the end of the 2014/15 session, however he urged everyone to remain cautious until he was in receipt of the final formal response.

4(ii) S3 Community Action Week – KG described this initiative which was due to be undertaken on a trial basis during w/c 18 May. A booklet was circulated setting out the range of activities and the numbers of pupils required to support each activity. Members acknowledged the positive nature of this initiative.

5. Primary Report - In her report, FM confirmed that Primary 6c made participated in the national final of the Schools' Court mooting competition where the pupils had given a very good account of themselves. (The Chairman, having attended, confirmed how interesting it was and how well the pupils had performed). Other Primary matters covered by FM included the perennial and popular Roman Show which followed on a visit by the children's parents to view the displays in the primary 3 classrooms of the work completed whilst studying the topic of Romans. This year's Primary seven show was Buggy Malone which SR noted was excellent and FM added that each year she is surprised and delighted at the commitment enthusiasm and energy devoted to these events. Cycling Proficiency training and testing had begun for the pupils of Primary six. Once again, Primary Seven pupils would be offered the opportunity to spend several days at Newlands in Cumbria, would participate in "transition" to the secondary school and would attend and participate in "Shakespeare Day" activities at Beaton Road. For the remaining Primary pupils there would be what she likes to refer to as 'Mad' Friday, the day when primary classes meet their teachers for session 2015/16 which was scheduled for 5th June

6. Governors' remarks – during his report, BW indicated that the item of greatest interest in the immediate term was the final outcome of the School Inspection. While BW was positive about the visit he was also cautious because at this stage all the school has is informal feedback. BW went on to comment that the Governors were committed to improving communication and concluded his remarks by highlighting that many of the matters discussed amongst the Governors are those discussed at HGSA and that this is indicative of shared interests in particular important areas of school activity and development.

7. 1957 Group – SR took the opportunity to describe the Group's detailed arrangements for Sports Day on 6 June. The other imminent event is the Uniform sale on 20 June. As always, any assistance in supporting the group's activities at these events would be gratefully received by SR

8. Sub Groups

8.1 S4 Careers Convention – KC gave feedback on the event in March. Overall, the convention had been a tremendous success in terms of pupil and consultant experience and had led to a number of offers from consultants to assist with mock interviews. KC thanked the members of the Committee for their continued support.

8.2 Constitution – BM has nearly completed a first draft review and is planning a sub group review to be close to complete by the end of the current session. If this can be achieved, this would allow a final review at the HGSA meeting in September with the intention of tabling a revised constitution at the AGM in October 2016. All members were encouraged to correspond with BM and identify any parts of the Constitution which might be improved or otherwise merited consideration and attention.

8.3 Social – EL has made tentative arrangements for an informal event (Parents lunch) in mid June 2015 – HGSA year reps to share details with parents, who are in turn asked to indicate their interest. The whole group discussed this matter again and while there is general enthusiasm for a significant event towards the end of session 2015/16, it was acknowledged for this to be successful, would require the full commitment of HGSA and a significant effort from members of the committee or others within the wider parent group and from the school. In this respect it was noted there was no obvious widespread commitment to social events similar to that which is manifest in some other independent schools. It was noted that in some other schools significant administrative support and marketing of such social events is provided.

9. AOCB – no additional items were raised.

10. Date of Next Meeting - September 2016 – date tbc.

Appendix 1 -

1, Recognise ASAP that the child needs Learning support. This can be done by class teachers and our qualified members of Learning Support staff monitoring the child's progress.

2, Inform parents by meeting that the child will be getting assessed and discuss the future teaching plan that will be in place.

3, The Law differs here from England. It seems that as long as you present enough evidence showing that the child has difficulties to the SQA then they will award that child with extra time/scribes or access to computers. This Law is the one item that makes me as a parent feel uneasy and I can only hope that the school have a good supply of teachers that are qualified in Learning Support to be able to guide these children through their school years.

4, Provide the parents with examples of that will be taught in school.

5, Provide the parents with examples of work that can be worked on at home.

6, Provide the parents with "suggestions of reading material" eg Barrington Stokes, magazines or Apps provided online.

7, Encourage parents to educate themselves on whatever support is needed.

There are plenty of websites www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk or you tube are great sources of information.

8, The Librarian in the Junior school has to be aware of who has Learning support and help guide and provide the child with the correct literature. (without the child feeling as if they are different to others)

9, As the child reaches Secondary School usually the problems arise when they have multiple subjects. If the schools policy doesn't change enabling the child to drop certain subjects sooner then it would be preferable to guide the child and family to where their strengths lie and what they will need to succeed in their career path in the future. This will need some forward planning but a huge relief to the family when a light is shown at the end of tunnel.

10, Most importantly, please make sure that all staff understand what it is like for a family and child to be in this situation. There are plenty of websites that can provide you with so much free information. The parents that care will have many questions to ask and will need answers. Maybe you could have a qualified member of staff to contact that could help us with these questions.

11, If you treat Learning Support in a positive and supportive manner then the child will become a positive and supportive person which are two excellent qualities to have.”